1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria

843 such as, in other parts of India, of the use of a knife or the cutting of anything; but ordinary enquiry elicited no clue to them.

844 It was said on page 106 that children are born in the menstruation hut or room. This is certainly the case so far as the private huts and rooms are concerned; but in my notes it is not clear whether births ever take place in the communal menstruation hut. They probably do not, because obviously it may be needed at any time for other women of the village, and I have notes of children in Hikpulla and Nugur, where there are communal menstruation huts, being born in a corner of the veranda of the house specially walled off for the purpose.

[777] Cases are known of a mother being delivered of a child in the fields or the forest, but this is considered very unlucky, and as soon as the mother knows that her hour is upon her, she must make every effort to get in time to the menstruation hut or room. During delivery she may have the comfort of the presence of her mother-in-law or some woman from the village; but there are no midwives, and the woman with her must not touch her or assist the delivery; the mother is expected to do everything for herself, and it is regarded as very wrong if she is unable to do so. They pray to the clan-god during a difficult delivery, but appear to do nothing else to assist the mother by either medicine or ceremony. The mother herself has to cut the navel-cord of her baby either with her husband's ordinary knife or with an arrow-head. She cuts it about three or four inches from its junction with the stomach, and binds it close to the junction with a ligature of cord, the portion between the cut and the ligature being left to dry and fall off; and she is expected to bury the placenta (*wodi*) immediately after this under the house rubbish-heap outside the back of the house. If the child is born [845 dead, the mother has to bury it somewhere in the forest, going there 766] alone and digging the grave without assistance; it may not be buried in the regular village graveyard. Around Handawada a mother is expected to stay in the menstruation room for a full month after delivery; but the general rule in the interior of the Abujhmar hills is for her to remain there for eight days or until the navel-cord dries and falls off.

846 Everywhere it is taboo for the father to do any field or other work during this period of eight days before the navel-cord falls. No medicine is given to him. He must not sleep in the house during the period in most parts of the hills, but in the dormitory; around Handawada he sleeps in the portion of the *kala* room separated from the woman's portion by the *binda* mud threshold. He must not cook his own food during this period, and has to get a man friend to cook food for him in another house and bring it to

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
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had to give a penalty feast to its tribe. It had everything ready save char nuts. When it heard where Waddai was going, it promised to cure his son if he would give it the nuts. The monkey went to the house, pretended to fall into a trance, shaking its head and body, and the boy at once recovered. The monkey told Waddai that he should always cure disease in this way.

'The sun had now set and Waddai went half-way with the monkey to see it home. It was very pleased with the nuts and took Waddai to a honeycomb, drove away the bees and gave the sweet juice and wax to him. Since that day, we have eaten honey and as Waddai took the first honey at night, we take it then also.'

The Muria distinguish four kinds of bees: the *bāgh ondār*, which live on big trees; the *satāru ondār*; the small *kitha ondār* and the *lokti ondār* or *mas*.[1] It is said that the hives of the *bāgh* and *satāru ondār* are discovered when they go according to their habit to get water from a trickling stream. Men go along the stream until they notice bees coming and going and then try to follow them home. The *lokti* are easier to find because they sit buzzing outside their hole, and the honey-gatherer is attracted to the place by the noise. Muria observation is shown by this account: 'All the swarm seek flowers and suck their sweet juice. As the bees sit on the flowers gum sticks to their feet. With this they build their hive, and put the juice inside. They build so well that not a drop leaks out.'

'Only a brave man will go for honey', say the Muria. When they have located a hive, two or three men go together; for the *bāgh ondār* (which are blind in the dark) they go at night. They tie grass at the end of a pole, light it and smoke out the bees. Then they place a bamboo ladder against the tree and climb up, though sometimes they cut the tree down to save themselves trouble, and collect the honey in hollow bamboo tubes.

The honey is eaten with wheat-cakes or mixed with flour and made into a sweet bread which is greatly liked by children.

Sometimes if the honey-gatherer is unsuccessful in finding a hive, he engages the Siraha or Gunia who searches for it with the help of the winnowing-fan or bits of grass. When he climbs the tree to get the honey, he calls upon the Dead to assist him.

Should a swarm make their hive in or near a house, it is considered very lucky.[2]

The Muria's interest in honey-gathering is indicated by the number of riddles about it.[3]

[1] Compare Thurston on the Kond: 'The Khonds recognize four different kinds of bees, known by the following Oriya names: (*a*) *bhaga mohu*, a large-sized bee (*Apis dorsata*); (*b*) *sattapuri mohu*, building its comb in seven layers (*Apis indica*); (*c*) *binchina mohu*, with a comb like a fan; (*d*) *nihiti mohu*, a very small bee.'—Thurston, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 363. I have found similar classifications among the Juang and Gadaba.

[2] 'It is considered very lucky if bees or white ants take up their abode in an empty house or at the gate of the city.'—*N.I. Notes and Queries*, Vol. V (1895), p. 52. See also ibid., p. 90. Many Naga actually hang the combs of bees or wasps in front of their houses, perhaps to frighten away wild cats: the Sema say they help to hatch hen's eggs; the Thado Kuki say they ward off evil spirits. Hutton recalls similar beliefs in the Andamans and Malaya, and adds 'I am disposed to suspect the survival of a definitely Negrito belief in the practice of hanging the combs of bees or wasps in the entrance of houses'.—J. H. Hutton, *Diaries of Two Tours in the Unadministered Area east of the Naga Hills* (Calcutta, 1929), p. 6.

[3] A Kharia riddle about the honeycomb: 'In a golden box bells are sounding: when you open it, you get sweet bread.'—S. C. Roy, *The Kharias* (Ranchi, 1937), Vol. II, p. 450.

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844 Until the stump falls the father is in a state of taboo. He must not cook, he must not leave the house to visit his friends, he cannot go to the ghotul. No one will accept his tobacco and he cannot share in a sacrificial feast.

843 Certain attempts are made to influence and to diagnose the sex of unborn children. If a motiari, after fasting for twelve hours at her first menstruation, eats a dish of *khichri*, a mixture of pulse and rice without salt, her children will likewise be a mixture of boys and girls. If she goes to the jungle on this day and brings home a bundle of leaves on her hip, she is likely to bear girls.

Sometimes Muria women try to discover the sex of the next child by examining the colour and number of the knots on the umbilical cord of the first, but that no one takes these forecasts very seriously is seen in the riddle about a pregnant woman.

[524] *Chipta upre jai phar,* There is fruit inside the basket,
Jāna bābu kai phar? How can you know what fruit it is?

845 Abnormal births are not common but are not unknown. Twins are called *jānwar jiya* and are not regarded as either particularly lucky or unlucky. Twins with a single placenta are born if the mother eats a double fruit such as a double plantain or tendu or uses double leaves as a plate. Sensible women are careful to avoid doing this but sometimes accidents happen. In Rengagondi, there are twins, named Joga and Jogi, who were born because the mother ate off a double leaf at the end of her period. Such twins may also be due to a woman's passing between two men on her way back to the house from her menstrual bath. The shadows of both men fall upon her and the twins resemble them. In some places, it is thought if she passes at this time a man holding a baby she will have twins—if it is a boy, she will have male twins; if a girl, male and female. If the woman lies on her back after intercourse so that the man's seed divides into two streams, twins may result. When there are two placentae it is often supposed that the woman has been to two men and the twins, therefore, have different fathers. The woman may also have had intercourse with a ghost or spirit on the day following intercourse with her husband. Where this is suspected, the twins (if boy and girl) are called Dukhalu and Dukhali and are vaguely regarded as unlucky.

● [777]

Pandru of Bermakot twice had twins, from different wives. The first were from the Manjaro whom he made pregnant in the ghotul and were both girls: the second were from the Nirosa, another of his ghotul lovers, and were both boys. Pandru thinks he had twins because he went to each of the girls twice on the night following the post-catamenial bath. If this is done during the rains, girls will be born: if during the hot weather, there will be boys.

[777] A foot-presentation is called in Gondi *tāli-janamta* or 'cow-birth', for the child is born like a calf. This is regarded as very unlucky indeed and the family must immediately protect the child by waving round it a bundle of burning grass. Such births are generally expected to be fatal to the mother. A *kera bānjh* is a woman with only one child; 'she is like a plantain which gives fruit once on a stalk and never again'.

II. Name-giving

559 After about six weeks the mother stops her ritual bathing and resumes her domestic duties inside the house. It is now time to give the child a name, a name—it must be remembered—which the little chelik or motiari will hardly use during the period of childhood, which will never be taken by husband or wife after marriage, and will be uttered only with reluctance after death. Even then a later nickname may supplant this *mur-podor* or original name.

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764 The Muria cremate the bodies of those who die of yaws, leprosy and dropsy, so a party of chelik went ahead to prepare the pyre. When the bearers reached the place, which was in thick jungle, on the far side of a stream, away from the usual crematorium, they carried the corpse round the pyre, which was below a great mahua tree, three times anti-clockwise, and then laid it on the ground to the south-west of the pyre with the feet to the west.

Each of the relatives present came forward and laid a small piece of cloth on the body. Dhako's father-in-law (a father-in-law or an elder brother is often the chief actor at a funeral) poured out some mahua spirit by the head of the corpse saying, 'Today accept this from our hands; after today how will you get it again?' They then removed most of the clothes, but tied one piece to a branch of the mahua tree. The rest they took home to distribute among the children.

The chelik lifted the corpse on to the pyre and the old Wadder woman placed a little earth on saja leaves at either side of the head. She took a stone and broke Dhako's bangles 'for now she is separated from her husband, she is a widow'. They put a little jawa-gruel and water by the head, leaving the pot there. The chelik piled wood and dry grass round the pyre, but none was actually laid on the body. They rested the bier against the pile of wood and one of the boys broke it with his axe, then struck the ground all round—to represent the driving of nails 'to close the house' and prevent the ghost walking, and then two of them threw the axe to and fro over the pyre three times.

Now the same chelik who had carried the bier lit bundles of grass from a coil of paddy-straw rope which had been brought slowly smouldering from the hearth of Genjru's house, and ran quickly two by two round the pyre in opposite directions kindling the dry grass. The flames shot up and the women broke into a loud and moving lamentation. The men threw twigs (of any tree) onto the burning corpse, muttering, 'God to whom we vowed gifts has failed us. Let him take these twigs instead, for it's all he'll get'.

The people stayed for a while, some of them looking up fearfully at the smoke to see if it would go straight into the air or no, then returned slowly and sorrowfully to Genjru's house. The father-in-law met us and distributed oil which was rubbed on face, hands and legs instead of a bath. He gave tobacco and liquor to those who had brought pieces of cloth to cover the corpse, but not to others. The people then slowly and quietly dispersed.

When the corpse is buried, similar customs are observed. On 12 November 1941 I attended the funeral of Bhaira, a middle-aged man of the Halami clan, at Gorma. Here the bier was covered with plantain leaves[1] and the corpse bound firmly to it with cord. Here it was the dead man's daughter-in-law who, with hair untied, followed the bier. When they reached the grave, which was about five feet deep, the village Siraha put a little cow-dung at the bottom, placed plantain leaves above and on the leaves some sticks. After the corpse had been lowered into the cavity, it was covered with plantain leaves, and the Gaita let a few drops of liquor fall by its head saying, 'When you were alive, I could give you nothing, but at least take this now'. After the grave had been filled in, large stones were placed upon the mound. The men went to bathe, but the women remained. The widow brought a pot containing all that was left of the food that had been cooked for the dead man on the day of his death, and emptied it near the grave. She was persuaded by the other women to sit down above her husband's

[1] Plantain leaves, which are sacred to the Hindus, are regarded as unlucky by the Muria because of their use in funerals.

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
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in his house, pulling himself up by a rope tied to the roof. 762
But at last he could bear it no longer and managed to hang himself with the very rope that had been so long his friend.

Menstrual troubles are always due to the magic of a jealous 762
woman, usually a frustrated and malicious widow. The 841
catamenial period in any case is regarded as a time of contagious danger and taboo, and any irregularity is sufficient to cause a strong psychotic disturbance.[1] Karti Sukri, a young girl of only fifteen years, apparently suffered from menorrhagia; she bore it for six months and then hanged herself with her own cloth from a mahua tree near her home. Markami Kosi had been married for twenty years, but she suffered acutely during menstruation—'the pain was so great she behaved as if she were mad'—and she too committed suicide. As is often the case when a woman suffers from menstrual troubles, the husband had married a second wife and I have little doubt that the jealousy and annoyance inevitable in a polygynous household played its part in hastening Markami Kosi's death. The younger wife, however, did her best to save the other woman; she cut her down while still breathing and tried to revive her.

In all these cases, matters were made worse by the failure 762
of the magicians to effect a cure. This naturally added fear and depression to the physical suffering of the patient. Whenever the Siraha is found helpless, an atmosphere of deep gloom and apprehension is created: the supernatural powers arrayed against the sufferer take on a new majesty and horror.

VII

CRIME AND SUPERSTITION

I have not found many superstitions about crime, probably 777
because there are so few professional criminals among the Maria. We have already seen how valuable blood is as a fertilizer. In one case I heard of women throwing their rings on a murdered man's memorial stone as it was being carried to the grave. Afterwards they picked up these rings and wore them believing them to be extremely lucky. But

[1] Havelock Ellis goes so far as to say that 'whenever a woman commits a deed of criminal violence it is extremely probable that she is at her monthly periods', but Stanley Hall assembles evidence to show that this view is over-stated. Hall, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 500.

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
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7771 am not sure that a ring associated with any kind of death is not equally useful.

787 844 The Maria magicians believe themselves able to foretell a child's destiny by certain signs at birth. If, at the place where the placenta is buried, there appear the footprints of a tiger or the marks of a snake, they declare that the child will be either killed by a tiger or bitten by a snake. If the water in the pot that is placed above the placenta-pit runs out of its own accord, it means that the child will be drowned. If a baby is born with a strangulating cord, it means that, when it grows up, it will either be hanged or will commit suicide by hanging.

000 But there is nothing to compare with the superstitions in Europe; the belief, for example, that the heart of a still-born child eaten while yet warm renders the eater invisible, thus aiding him to steal. Adam gives a number of beliefs from the Western world that equal the most bizarre of those recorded in Asia. He describes the soporiferous candles made of the fat of virgin children and used to see whether anyone was still awake in a house about to be burgled. The left thumb of a corpse nine weeks in the grave enables a thief to enter a house at night without rousing the occupants. In Poland the right hand of the corpse of a suicide may be used to discover stolen goods. In Italy, especially in Sicily, it is still believed that treasure can be unearthed with the assistance of the blood of innocent children.[1]

826 [1] Adam, op. cit., pp. 261 ff. In Mandla District I have met Gond who believe that when a man is hanged a few drops of *jiu-tel*, or "life-oil", fall from his body. If this oil can be obtained and applied to a dying man, he will be restored to life. At one time Mr Hivale was believed to possess a few drops of this precious liquid. The 'Hand of Glory' idea has its parallel in India. In Chittagong it was at one time customary for dacoits (mostly Mohammedan) to spread a shroud stolen from a corpse over the roof of a house to prevent the inhabitants from waking. See E. O. Sherborne, *Man*, Feb. 1934.

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
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Aranpur I saw a large pile of ashes and half-burnt logs of 764
wood in front of the uraskal stones erected in memory of members of the Barse clan. These were the remains of the pyre for Barse Chewa who had recently been hanged. In this case it was considered of ill omen that, although two attempts were made to burn the pyre, a lot of the wood remained unburnt. In other villages, however, we were told that such ceremonies must not be performed in the neighbourhood of the menhirs.

There seems to be no objection to erecting an uraskal or danyakal stone either for murderers or for their victims. At Palnar an uraskal was mounted for Mulami Bella. At Dugeli an uraskal was erected for a murdered man. In other villages such as Metapal (where there is no uraskal for Banjami Irma who was murdered by his own son) or at Gandarguda (where there is no danyakal for Rawa Hirma) the absence of these memorials is said to be due to the fact that the deceased were poor men and their relatives could not afford them. But at Dugeli, Kunjami Pandu told us that an uraskal for a murdered man can only be erected after the case against the murderer is settled. When his own brother was murdered, he did not at first erect a stone for [767] him, and he was continually troubled by the restless ghost who came in dreams to reproach him for not 'mingling his soul with the dead, and for his failure to give him a stone'. Once Pandu did this, he had no more bad dreams.

The ceremonies of erecting a menhir for a murderer are exactly the same as for anyone else. When the villagers were carrying the stone for Mulami Bella at Palnar, they halted and put it on the ground, and the women of the house threw rings on to it. Afterwards the women eagerly collected these [777] rings, for it is considered very lucky to wear them.

On the forest road between Palnar and Jabeli there is a row of the flat memorial stones called danyakal, and at one end a tall carved wooden pillar and a large earthen tomb. The tomb, the pillar and one of the stones are in honour of Marvi Oyami Masa who died in jail while serving a sentence for the murder of his uncle. Masa was a very important man in Jabeli. He was rich, he was the Waddai of the village and he was a Siraha medicine-man. His death seemed to be far more important to the villagers than that of the man